



**Speech delivered to**

**The Canadian Club**

**By Wayne Clarkson,**

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**(Check against delivery)**

Thank you, Michael, for offering me this distinguished podium to speak from, and for your generous words of introduction.

To everyone here, to the filmmakers, the creative community, the business and cultural leaders, the philanthropists, the media, the industry heads, the lobbyists and the few unfortunates who have wandered in to the wrong room, I have a single message:

*“I am from the government and I am here to help you.”*

As I suspected, the subject of government intervention is not greeted with rapturous applause at Canadian Club luncheons.

But I believe when it comes to Canada’s cultural industries, and especially film and television, government intervention is good.

No, I’m wrong about that. Government intervention is not good – it’s absolutely critical.

It’s the difference between being Canadian and simply not being American.

For well over 75 years, ever since the CBC was founded in 1929, Canada’s governments have been intervening to support and strengthen Canadian culture.

Why?

Because we're a very small population in a very large space. So creating the myths that shape and distinguish us from the world's other tribes, communicating the stories that define our identity, isn't an easy task.

But countries such as Spain and Australia have a similar population, and a flourishing culture, *especially* in film and television.

What's the difference? In three words....

Proximity to America.

Our neighbour to the south has 10 times the number of people we do, and has an incredibly strong culture that is also highly aggressive. Indeed, since 1992, entertainment, and by that I mean books and movies and TV shows and recordings, has been America's second largest export product, next only to aerospace.

I enjoy telling the story of being struck by a car right after seeing my first film when I was 6 and the subsequent "impact" movies have had on my life.

But the story that resonates more than that dramatic moment was some years later, when I was a teenager living in the west end of Toronto and saw my first Canadian Feature – Don Owens' "Nobody Waved Goodbye."

It had no less an impact than that car – here was a movie on the big screen about my country, set in my neighbourhood, teenager's coming of age – my fears and aspirations.

The commitment to Canadian cinema, its values, stories and talent was planted.

Northrop Frye expressed it best for me: “Identity is local and regional – rooted in the imagination and in works of culture.”

If there was no CBC to produce original Canadian drama; if the Canada Council hadn't been created in 1957 to help Canadian writers, dancers, painters and symphony orchestras and opera companies; if Ottawa hadn't created the National Film Board in 1939; CRTC hadn't regulated radio stations could play, pushing Canadian songs and singers into the foreground; if Telefilm Canada hadn't been created in 1967 to develop an indigenous film industry; if the provincial governments hadn't created agencies to help in that never-ending process, then.....then what?

I absolutely believe there would be no Margaret Atwood, no Karen Kain, no Atom Egoyan, no Ben Heppner, no Barenaked Ladies, no Denys Arcand, no Paul Gross. No Robert Lantos. *No Alliance Atlantis.*

So without the right kind and amount of government support, I believe Canada would be as different from America as... well, as Monaco is from France.

After all, culture today is what sets one nation apart from another and gives people their unique identity.

And far from being a producer of ‘soft’ ephemeral jobs, the film and television industries in particular create the very jobs – the ‘above-the-neck’ jobs - that will secure Canada’s economic prosperity in the years to come.

The American academic, Richard Florida, first made the link between the density of cultural creativity and the economic prospects of a city or region.

He talks about a ‘super-creative class’ – by this he means artists, entertainers, musicians and cultural producers. But he also means research scientists, engineers, doctors – whose creativity .... well.... *creates* new kinds of wealth and with it, new sources of economic growth.

For Florida, there are three “T”s of economic development: Technology, Talent and Tolerance. In this new “economic geography,” the cities, regions and countries that succeed will do so by attracting and keeping these super-creative producers.

It’s no coincidence that Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver are three of the most creative cities on the continent and all are rich in cultural diversity.

And we will become even richer for as the Globe and Mail reported last week – by 2012 more than 50% of Canadians will be visible minorities.

The New Zealand Minister of State is quoted: “We no longer think of immigration as a gate-keeping function but as a talent attraction function – necessary for economic success.”

In a global ranking of the percentage of workers in the creative class – Ireland was # 1. Canada #8 and the U.S. #11.

Our own Allan Gregg, who is here today, also drew a strong link in a recent speech between cultural activity and political engagement. He pointed to the galvanizing effect that watching films and television shows by and about ourselves and reading books about ourselves can have on our shared experience as Canadians.

So we shouldn't be surprised that cities like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver use their cultural power to sustain their economic power, and will do so more and more, largely because of their filmmakers, artists, musicians and writers.

It's also no coincidence that we can read in the *New York Times* that a cinema studies degree is the new MBA.

*The Times* points out that 600 American colleges and universities now offer programs in film studies. Is it because everyone wants to be a Director? Probably! But it's also about power.

And I quote: "People endowed with social power and prestige are able to use film and media images to reinforce and assert their power. We need to look to film to grant power to those who are marginalized."

As *The Times* predicts: “Cinema isn’t so much a profession as the professional language of the future.” And “the greatest digital divide is between those who can read and write with media and those who can’t.”

We saw this happen when Michael Moore decided to make a documentary about 9/11 or Morgan Spurlock decided to document the effect of McDonald’s in *Supersize Me*.

We also saw it when Canadians Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott made a documentary called *The Corporation*.

And let’s not hide under a bushel here, it’s also because of the political will of Ottawa and the provinces to support their cultural agencies.

Forty years ago, Ottawa decided to create the predecessor to Telefilm Canada, the Canadian Film Development Corporation. It had an initial budget of \$10 million a year to fund Canadian films and Canadian talent. Today, in part because of Telefilm’s consistent and rising level of support, that industry is worth over \$3 billion to our national economy and plays a significant role in virtually every provincial economy.

Now Los Angeles isn’t a bad place, and many Canadians have chosen to move there, to work in Hollywood. But government support – Telefilm support – has made it possible for literally thousands of Canadian writers, directors, producers, actors and technicians to build their careers here at home, to work in their own part of Canada and their mother tongue.

David Cronenberg said it best: “Telefilm’s involvement in my filmmaking kept me in Canada. I was on the verge [...] of moving to Los Angeles.”

Today, the lines between movies that play in theatres and movies that play on flat screen HDTVs with wraparound sound in the comfort of our homes are completely blurred.

So while the second half of our organization’s name is rooted in film, the first part is rooted in the most powerful form of communication developed by humankind.

In fact, so enticing and satisfying is television that, despite the Internet, despite countless other things to do, despite no NHL hockey, Canadians continue to spend an average of 24 hours a week with the flickering blue screen.

It makes sense then, that another of the keys to building the new economic landscape is strengthening Canadian television, especially English Canadian drama.

To quote Phyllis Yaffe in a recent *Toronto Star* article: “Canadians should own their culture and we should be the gatekeeper in our country.”

These days, it seems the more “Canadian” some programs are, the more they resonate with viewers. On CBC, the two-part epic series *Shattered City: The Halifax Explosion* drew two million viewers a night.

*Corner Gas*, the comedy series on CTV, is drawing close to 2 million viewers each week.

And *Degrassi: The Next Generation* is regularly attracting more than 600,000 Canadian viewers each week.

It's also attracting the attention of the world's most powerful media pundits. Earlier this month, the New York Times Magazine profiled the original DeGrassi, calling it "the best teen TV in the world," and told how it has become an American cult hit.

*Degrassi?* A cult hit? Absolutely. In the rigidly politically correct world of primetime American television, issues like date rape, Ritalin abuse and gay boyfriends never make it on the major networks.

But millions of American teens now search out the hard to find digital channel that dares to broadcast a series about teen stories from a teen's point of view.

I guess teens in 150 countries (outside of prime-time America) prove you can tell stories about a high school two miles east of where we're having lunch and have the world flock to watch them.

And speaking of cult hits, let's not forget *Trailer Park Boys*, which is now in its fourth year on the Canadian specialty channel, Showcase. Next month, it will be premiering in the U.S. on, of all networks, BBC America.

"IDENTITY IS LOCAL AND REGIONAL – ROOTED IN THE IMAGINATION AND WORKS OF CULTURE."

Canada has been the home not only to its own theatrical and television productions, but more and more, other countries' productions as well – and particularly America's.

In 1994-1995, the value of these productions was \$539 million. By 2003-2004, they had ballooned to \$1.9 billion. They came here because of the low-cost Canadian dollar and the high-quality Canadian crews. The Governor of California launched a campaign against these so-called 'runaway' productions. Then last year, the value of the Canadian dollar rose considerably. If you were a New York producer, there was less reason to run away.

It didn't take City Hall and Queen's Park long to realize just how important film production is to the economic life of their communities.

And it also didn't take Vancouver or Halifax, or all the other filmmaking jurisdictions in Canada, to immediately start offering additional tax incentives to compensate for the higher Canadian dollar. But as the *Globe and Mail* asked: "Are tax credits a mug's game?"

But I ask you to imagine what could happen if the same provinces competed as vigorously with each other to increase funding for development and investment in their own local talent and productions.

Now let me reassure everyone in the room that I did not say in my recent speech in Ottawa that provincial tax credits aren't important – they are.

The point I made then and repeat now is that the Canadian industry also needs more provincial and municipal support in order to build that foundation of domestic production.

And I encourage Minister Meilleur and her cabinet colleagues to expand their commitment, to create new development and production funding. Not just for Made-in-Ontario productions, but Made-About-Ontario productions by Ontario's emerging filmmakers – after all you have the finest film, television and new media training facility right here in Toronto - The Canadian Film Centre.

Now you might think this is an impertinent idea, coming from someone who has been a federal civil servant for all of two months.

But let us Ontarians look to the province east of us, to Quebec, to see just how their government's consistent investment – through their agency, SODEC – has had a direct impact with that industry's success in connecting with film and television audiences.

Ten years ago, Quebec producers who were making films for a market that's a third the size of the English-speaking Canadian market, productions, by Quebecers about Quebec, accounted for only 6% of all box office receipts in the province. Today, that figure stands at 21%, more than triple what it was in 1995.

When I told a friend about this remarkable transformation, he assured me the reason wasn't so much SODEC's funding, but the fact that Quebec culture is so much more concentrated and has the linguistic advantage. I had to remind him that I was almost sure Quebecers were speaking French long before SODEC brought in its new programs.

No, Quebec's success, as further evidenced by the recent Genie Awards, is the product of stable financial support, as part of a long-term plan to build audiences, encourage talent, and in the process, create highly skilled, well-paying jobs. What's the ultimate goal? To repatriate and assert more and more of their culture.

But the renaissance in Quebec film is not limited to theatres; it's also happening on television. Over the past 20 years in French Canada, viewership for American television programs has fallen by more than half.

This repatriation is not just happening in Quebec. In Great Britain, in Italy, in Sweden, in fact, all over Europe, audiences have been watching less and less foreign programming and more and more of their own.

Yes, we have wonderful shows, like *Da Vinci's Inquest*, *The Eleventh Hour* and *This is Wonderland*. But each year, there are fewer and fewer of them, which makes reaching larger audiences an even bigger challenge.

But we all know that the more specific you are, the more universal you are. And that's why well-produced Canadian drama - shows by and about Canadians - whether they live in a trailer park in Dartmouth, work in a courthouse in downtown Toronto, or a general store in Dog River, Saskatchewan, will, given half a chance, find an audience, not only in Canada, but beyond our borders as well.

So in both television and film, it's tempting to conclude that the country has the confidence, the government has the commitment and the industry has the critical mass to shift into and reach the potential so many people, including many from this podium, have predicted for Canadian culture.

What is clear after 40 years of federal government support for Canada's film and television industries is that we have almost reached a tipping point. All of those sustained investments have created a multi-billion dollar industry where none existed before.

But in a business that's been described as the ultimate collaborative act, we're going to need help for that tipping point we've reached to really tip.

We continue to face some very large challenges ahead – roadblocks to a robust industry and a stronger identity that neither money from Ottawa, nor Telefilm on its own, can resolve.

At the Canadian Association of Broadcasters conference in early December and again at the Canadian Film and Television Producers Association conference in February the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Honourable Liza Frulla set forth her priorities and the increased role Telefilm was to play.

One commitment she made was to work to maintain the Canadian Television Fund and to work with industry leaders to address the Governance of the Fund.

In the upcoming weeks, Minister Frulla will present her response to the Lincoln Report, her vision for the Canadian audiovisual industry.

The responsibility will then rest with us - those who design public policy, those who regulate it and those who deliver Canadian programming created by Canadian talent – to align our mutual interests.

It's time for a "Real Public/Private partnership."

A partnership that reflects the commercial realities of the market place and honours public policy objectives.

A public private partnership that achieves measurable savings and realize new cost efficiencies in its administration.

The Canadian Television Fund and Telefilm Canada with separate boards - but with overlapping, shared interests and responsibilities - delivered efficiently and effectively by one administration that is decentralized and accessible to stakeholders across Canada can be one of those real public/private partnerships.

I quoted Allan Gregg earlier when he drew the link between the strength of a nation's culture and the political engagement of its citizens. But he also observed that funding for the arts and culture is invariably at the bottom of the list when Canadians are asked what their priorities are for government spending.

I find this odd and contradictory given the extraordinary renaissance that has taken place here in Toronto because of the hundreds of millions of dollars in new money that has poured into the city to build new homes for the arts and culture, rivalling the most dazzling anywhere in the world.

While people use to complain about being caught in traffic caused by a film production, now the complaint is about all that construction – at the AGO, at the ROM, at the Royal Conservatory, at the Opera House up and soon I hope the Toronto International Film Festival's new home.

Yes, this revitalization of Toronto is well underway, and it's happening because the governments, federal and provincial; corporations and people who may claim that arts and culture is their lowest priority, but who have made it their highest priority.

So let's make Canadian cinema and television our highest priority.

And the first step on that bold adventure is to go and see a Canadian film. We've made it easy for you. When you leave, you'll be given a ticket that offers you free admission for two to any Canadian film playing in a Famous Players, Cineplex Odeon or Alliance Atlantis theatre in the GTA in the next month – thank you Famous, Odean and Alliance/Atlantis.

A final word of advice - after the movie - watch out for cars when crossing the street – you could get hooked on Canadian film!!

Thank you.

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